

Short inspection of Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council

Inspection dates:

5 and 6 June 2024

Outcome

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council continues to be a good provider.

Information about this provider

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council provide education, training and community learning courses for adults through the Wirral Lifelong Learning Service (the service). Community learning courses help learners to improve their essential skills, prepare for employment, build confidence and improve their well-being. Accredited courses include English, mathematics, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), and digital skills.

There are currently 1,832 learners enrolled. Almost half attend community learning courses. The remainder study for qualifications from pre-entry to level 3. Approximately 800 learners study at entry and level 1, 180 at level 2 and five at level 3. Leaders also work with 12 subcontractors across the borough to provide specialist provision in areas such as mental health awareness, substance abuse and youth work. Teaching takes place at 60 venues across the borough.

The service was previously inspected and graded good in February 2018.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Most learners have not participated in education for a considerable time and often lack confidence or are apprehensive about returning to learning. They find their courses accessible, highly practical and relevant.

Learners develop new knowledge and skills. ESOL learners, who start with a very basic level of English, soon develop confidence in their reading, writing and spoken English. Learners on teaching assistant courses find out about different reading strategies to use with children.

Leaders ensure learners benefit from working with employers and community groups. Tutors invite guest speakers from energy providers to help learners understand smart meters. On basic digital skills courses, the cyber security officer from the local police force attends lessons to discuss online safety.

Learners develop their confidence, particularly as tutors tailor course content to meet their needs and interests. On digital skills, tutors ask learners about the specific applications or functions on their electronic devices that they need help with. Learners discover how to take and edit photographs and use cloud storage and automated notetaking.

Learners feel safe in their learning environments and understand how to keep themselves safe online.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders provide courses that directly meet the needs of learners in their community. Most learners first study non-accredited courses as part of community learning. This means they can build their confidence and study skills before they move on to accredited qualifications.

Leaders ensure that most tutors sequence their curriculums effectively. On basic digital skills, learners start with file management before moving on to create files. Learners then use word processing applications and implement these new skills to create text for their presentations. Most tutors monitor the progress that learners make closely and regularly. Learners' work improves following tutors' useful feedback.

Tutors are knowledgeable about their subject and use questioning effectively to check learners' understanding and correct any misconceptions. However, a few tutors do not use questioning effectively enough. They too frequently target the whole group, and not individuals, to respond.

Most tutors find out what learners know and can do to plan learning. However, on a few courses, tutors do not specifically consider learners' English and mathematical skills carefully enough. A few learners on digital skills struggle with basic mathematical concepts, such as subtraction and multiplication, when trying to add formulae to their spreadsheets.

Most tutors ensure that learners with additional learning needs receive the support that they need. However, a few tutors do not make referrals for additional learning support swiftly enough. Learners struggle with remembering key concepts and find it difficult to apply them independently.

Almost all learners complete and achieve their community learning courses. Although most learners achieve their qualifications, learners do not achieve consistently well on ESOL courses, some mathematics units and the award in essential digital skills. Most learners progress to positive destinations. So far this year, almost two thirds have progressed to further education, training or employment.

Learners have access to relevant and impartial careers education, information, advice and guidance. They use a range of independent careers advisers, including the National Careers Service, where they develop their CVs, and job search and interview skills. Learners are clear about their future ambitions such as working in the care sector or developing their online business.

Leaders manage change effectively and they understand what they need to do to further improve. Although they use a range of quality assurance procedures, these do not focus sharply enough on the quality of education. For example, in lesson observations, managers provide tutors with suggestions to improve that are not always well grounded in educational research. Leaders do not provide tutors with sufficient professional development to improve their teaching.

Leaders work effectively with several subcontractors across the borough. They use these arrangements to engage the hardest to reach learners in deprived communities. Leaders maintain a thorough oversight of the work of subcontracted partners through regular management meetings.

Governors bring a wealth of relevant experience to their roles. They are committed to working with leaders to improve the lives of learners in their community. However, they are not fully aware of what leaders are doing to tackle the low achievement on a few qualifications.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve achievement rates on the few courses where they are too low.
- Use quality assurance processes to bring about greater consistency in terms of tutors' teaching practices and their compliance with key service procedures.
- Provide up-to-date and evidence-based professional development for tutors so they can continue to develop their teaching skills.

Provider details

Unique reference number	55402
Address	Wirral Council Mallory Building 2 Alice Ker Square Birkenhead Wirral Cheshire CH41 2AB
Contact number	0151 666 5254
Website	www.wirral.gov.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Paul Smith, Head of Service
Provider type	Community learning and skills – local authority
Date of previous inspection	12 to 15 February 2018
Main subcontractors	Amber Button Be Well Learning Crea8ing Communities Earth Moves FTW Training Next Chapter 3D Training Wirral Environmental Network Wirral Mind Youth Federation

Information about this inspection

The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council was judged to be good in February 2018.

The inspection team was assisted by the curriculum leader, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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His Majesty's Inspector

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